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There is no homeland where there are no rights

Rui Tavares explains the purpose of his report on Hungarian Constitutional reforms & core EU values

Article 2
Treaty on European Union - 2009

"*The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.*"

"When you look at Article 2, what you have there is the foundations of the Union; it says the Union is founded upon these values: democracy, rule of law, human rights.

The question then is, do we take them seriously or not? Do we allow these values to be just words on paper or do we want them to be upheld in the Union and do we want the citizens to have the guarantee that the institutions, the Parliament and the other institutions will fight for these values.

I think that this report does not deal with matters of left versus right; this report is not about an ideological battle but it's about common values, shared values, that allow us all to coexist.

This is not a Hungarian problem. This is not a question about Hungary and it's not about pinpointing or scapegoating Hungary. It's about Europe, it can happen in any country that we have questions regarding Article 2 and we are not sufficiently equipped on the side of the Union to make good on those values and to keep the European promise.

Of course all governments change many things during their mandate. You can change the civil code, the electoral law, or the judiciary, or the laws regulating the judiciary. What is really rare is that you change them all, in one go, and that you also change the constitution and amend the constitution four times in a little over a year. When you do that you pass a threshold from piecemeal change into systemic change and there is a general trend in this systemic change that is towards reinforcing the powers of government.

I think Hungary has played a huge role in the fight for freedom and fundamental rights in Europe and it has many times been a very ungrateful role because the Hungarians have suffered much; in '56 they suffered much, they fought for freedom in Europe and they were, one could say, abandoned by Europe. This is something that as someone from the other side of the continent, from Portugal, I can relate to because we were also abandoned in a dictatorship in my own country for many years, for 48 years in my country, also for a very large period in Hungary.

And the spirit of democratisation in Europe, the spirit of the '70s in Portugal and Spain and the spirit of '89 in Eastern Europe, I think it is a very important one for Europe in that it is the one that I find today in Article 2 of the treaties. It means that we shall not abandon our European brothers and sisters if they need us in terms of fighting for the fundamental rights of everybody.

So what people wanted in '89 and onwards from being in Europe is to have a framework where we are interconnected in the defence of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for the fundamental rights of the citizens.

I'm in the European Parliament now, I was not before, I will not be after, and when I go back to my regular life, what I will wish from the European Parliament is that if my fundamental rights are at risk, there will be somebody here that will take it very, very, seriously and that will fight for the protection of my fundamental rights.

So as maybe the greatest of Hungarian poets Sándor Petőfi once said, "you don't have a homeland, you don't have a home if you don't have rights" and that is, I think, something that goes for Hungary and goes for the whole of the European Union.

"There is no homeland where there are no rights"

Sándor Petőfi: A nép (The People), 1846

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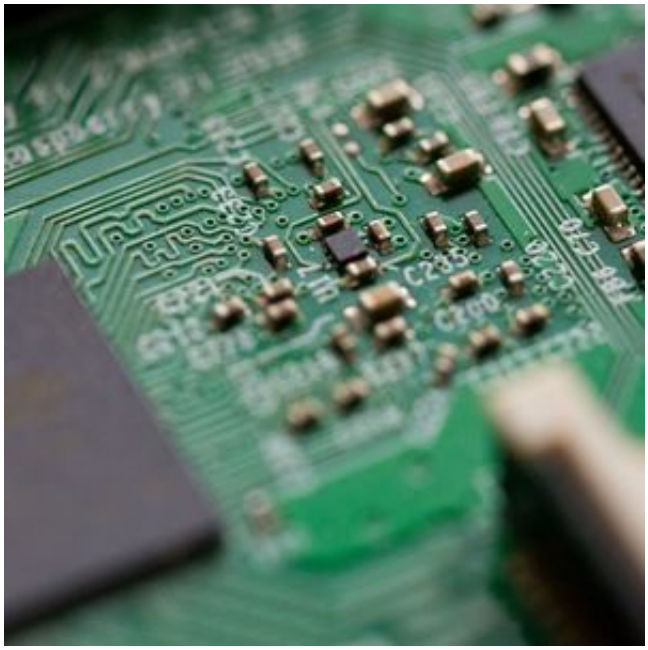


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